

woven, brightly colored, and infuriatingly human tapestry of life, death, greed, and adventure that will be of great service to period scholars.

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*The Madman and the Churchrobber: Law and Conflict in Early Modern England.*  
Jason Peacey.

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John Smyth, a lawyer and aggressive litigant, once remarked that lawsuits dragged on and created new legal quarrels just “as a fiery comet draws her tail” (75). Jason Peacey’s *The Madman and the Churchrobber* seeks to analyze one such shooting celestial phenomenon in early modern England: the century-long dispute over the lease of Warrens Court, a hundred-acre property in Nibley, Gloucestershire. Peacey tracks its evolution from a simple inheritance quarrel to a multi-front war over the running of a grammar school involving scandalous pamphlets, accusations of libel, and violent threats. The two main protagonists of this story, John Smyth and Benjamin Crokey, inherited the dispute and would later pass it on to their children as the enmity outlived them both. Peacey takes a microhistorical approach to a wealth of archival material to illuminate the mental worlds of the litigants, discover why a seemingly insignificant property inspired such great expenditures on both sides, and ultimately connect the details of this case to larger ideological tensions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Part 1, “Suits,” lays out the dispute in chronological order, introducing the major players and setting the stage for later analysis. Peacey divides the dispute into two broad arcs. The first period, from 1560 to 1615, primarily focused on the land itself, though the matter entered different court systems and resulted in contradictory verdicts, prolonging the conflict. Smyth’s acquisition of a small grammar school in 1608 brought about the second stage of the dispute (1615–62). Peacey presents litigation as “an iterative process” and emphasizes how both sides pursued multiple legal avenues, challenging both the substance and the manner of their opponent’s litigation (51). The hostility and complexity of the case increased over time, eventually moving into the public arena through Crokey’s publication of pamphlets and Smyth’s subsequent accusations of libel.

Part 2, “Strategies,” analyzes how Smyth and Crokey perceived their conflict. Though both men acted strategically, they had different expectations of the legal system, and this discordance drove further litigation. Crokey saw bad practices and corruption in what Smyth considered legitimate legal tactics, while Smyth balked at Crokey’s escalation into petitions, printed lobbying, and pamphlets. Crokey’s tactics relate to early modern print culture, a subject which Peacey has explored before, particularly in his book *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (2013). In analyzing

Crokey's pamphlets and their reception, he sees evidence of "contemporary fascination with, nervousness about, and acculturation to print media" (194).

Part 3, "Structures," connects the Warrens Court dispute to the larger cultural landscape of early modern England, arguing that the conflict persisted not only due to the doggedness of the individuals involved but also because of its connections to larger political, religious, and socioeconomic tensions. Peacey analyzes the networks of Smyth and Crokey, and, in the absence of direct evidence, extrapolates their mental worlds from the views of their associates, contrasting Smyth's conservatism and pragmatic royalism with Crokey's Puritanism. Conflicting ideologies inspired contemporary public interest in the case and showed how "legal, political, and religious controversies were playing out in local communities and everyday lives," not merely in seats of power (281).

Many microhistories end up being, at least partially, an argument for their own methodology. *The Madman and the Churchrobber* is no exception, and Peacey describes his approach as "longue durée microhistory" and "extended case method" (278). This method allows Peacey to track the conflict over time while still maintaining a microscopic focus on the details, from the slippers Smyth purchased for his wife to the charmingly precise insults of Crokey's vitriolic pamphlets. The "flavour of the contemporary rhetoric" is not limited to the title of this book, which gives us just two of the many insults that flowed between the two combatants (5). Frequent direct quotes enrich the text and bring the reader into the world of the protagonists.

Peacey comments several times on the potential challenges of his text, that he "might be accused of offering a dizzying chronicle" (72) and that readers might "despair about the possibility of keeping track of a convoluted story" (34). On this account he may not be entirely wrong, as the intricacies of how early modern law functioned are sometimes lost in the focus on the motivations of the protagonists, and he takes little time to contextualize contemporary politics. However, his fear that the "jigsaw puzzle" of the Warrens Court conflict "might not be so appealing to the reader" (278) is unfounded, as what might seem to be a dry inheritance dispute is revealed to be anything but.

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*The State Trials and the Politics of Justice in Later Stuart England*. Brian Cowan and Scott Sowerby, eds.

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The term *state trial* refers to legal proceedings before the law courts or in parliament that were linked to political issues such as treason, charges of political corruption, or general